

producing at least one mild area in the steel sheet product,
the mild area having a hardness substantially less than the
hardness of the ^{hardened} at least a portion of the steel sheet product;
and

forming the at least one mild area in the steel sheet
product.--

--12. The method of making a sheet steel product according
to Claim 11 wherein said step of forming the at least one mild
area in the steel sheet product comprises removing at least a
section of the at least one mild area in the steel sheet
product.--

³--13. The method of making a sheet steel product according
to Claim 12 wherein said step of hardening at least a portion of
the steel sheet product to a hardness comprises rapidly cooling
the at least a portion of the steel sheet product.--

⁴--14. The method of making a steel sheet product according
to Claim 13 wherein said step of producing at least one mild area
in the steel sheet product comprises preventing the at least one
mild area from rapidly cooling.--

⁵--15. The method of making a sheet steel product according
to Claim 14 wherein said step of providing a tool for holding the
steel sheet comprises providing a two-piece tool for holding the
steel sheet.--

⁶--16. The method of making a sheet steel product according
to Claim 15 wherein said step of removing at least a section of

the at least one mild area in the steel sheet product comprises machining the at least one mild area in the steel sheet product.--

7 --17. The method of making a steel sheet product according to Claim ~~16~~⁶ wherein said step of preventing the at least one mild area from rapidly cooling comprises maintaining a distance between the two-piece tool and the at least one mild area in the steel sheet.--

8 --18. The method of making a steel sheet product according to Claim ~~16~~⁶ wherein said step of preventing the at least one mild area from rapidly cooling comprises providing at least one heat insulating portion in the two-piece tool adjacent the at least one mild area.--

9 --19. The method of making a steel sheet product according to Claim ~~16~~⁶ wherein said step of providing at least one heat insulating portion in the two-piece tool adjacent the at least one mild area comprises positioning at least one heat insulating insert in the two-piece tool adjacent the at least one mild area.--

10 --20. The method of making a steel sheet product according to Claim ~~19~~⁹ wherein said step of positioning at least one heat insulating insert in the two-piece tool adjacent the at least one mild area comprises positioning at least one ceramic insert in the two-piece tool adjacent the at least one mild area.--

11 --21. The method of making a steel sheet product according to Claim ~~19~~⁹ wherein said step of positioning at least one heat

insulating insert in the two-piece tool adjacent the at least one mild area comprises positioning an induction-cooling element in the two-piece tool adjacent the at least one mild area.--

12 --~~22~~³. The method of making a steel sheet product according to Claim ~~23~~³ wherein said step of producing at least one mild area in the steel sheet product comprises tempering at least one portion of the at least a portion of the steel sheet product.--

13 --~~23~~¹³. The method of making a sheet steel product according to Claim ~~22~~¹³ wherein said step of removing at least a section of the at least one mild area in the steel sheet product comprises machining the at least one mild area in the steel sheet product.--

14 --~~24~~¹³. The method of making a sheet steel product according to Claim ~~23~~¹³ wherein said step of providing a tool for holding the steel sheet comprises providing a two-piece tool for holding the steel sheet.--

15 --~~25~~¹⁴. The method of making a steel sheet product according to Claim ~~24~~¹⁴ comprising the step of removing the steel sheet product from the two-piece tool after said step of tempering at least one portion of the at least a portion of the steel sheet product.--

16 --~~26~~¹⁴. The method of making a steel sheet product according to Claim ~~24~~¹⁴ comprising the step of removing the steel sheet product from the two-piece tool before said step of tempering at least one portion of the at least a portion of the steel sheet product.--